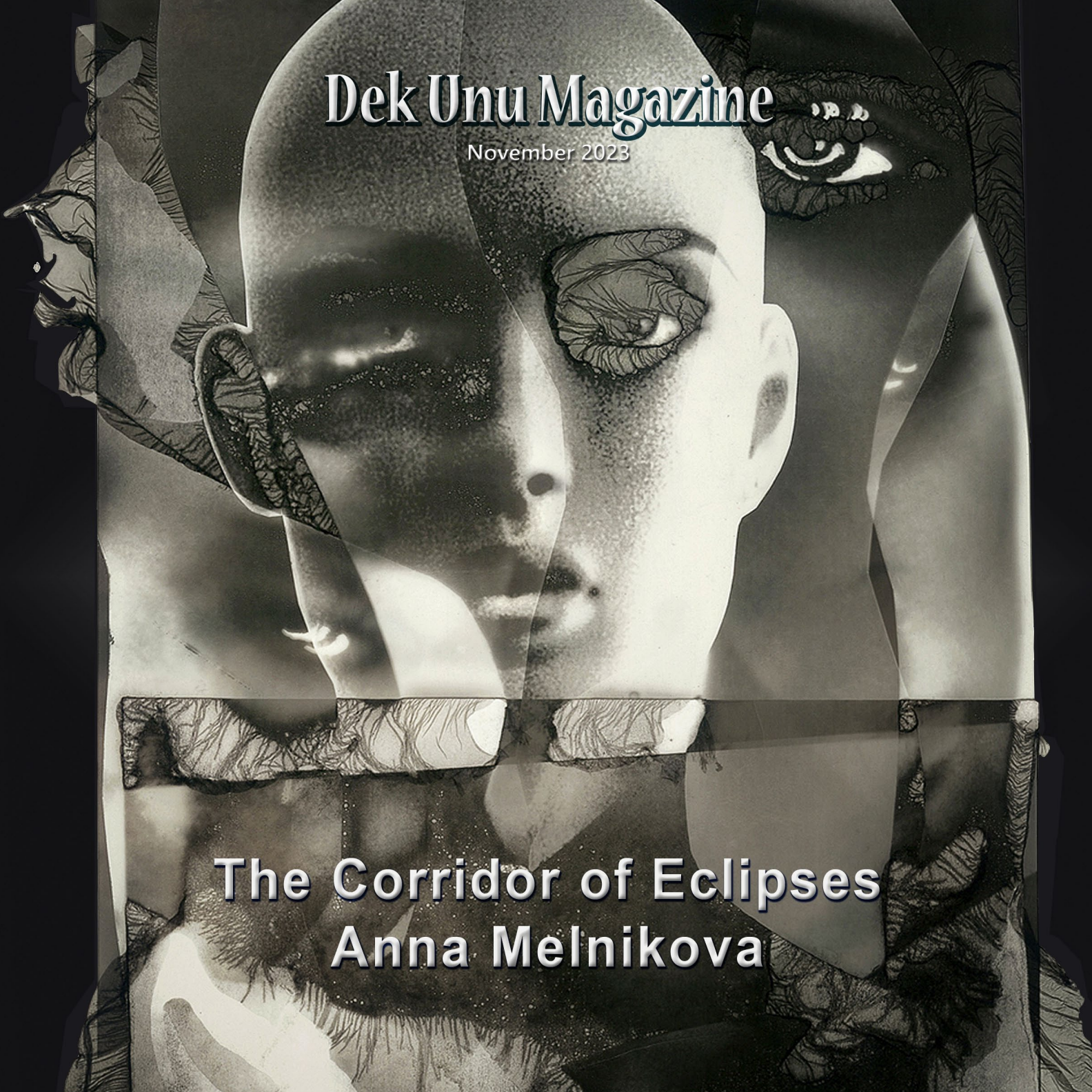




# Dek Unu Magazine

November 2023

The Corridor of Eclipses  
Anna Melnikova



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## Eleven

This is Dek Unu Magazine. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues in each publication year. Dek Unu publishes the work of a new artist-photographer in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at Dek Unu, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

### **This Month**

A remarkable number of serious artist-photographers subscribe to the dictum, "Finished means posted." The reasons are many: almost impossibly capable digital cameras, lots of tools for website creation without tears, an internet-enabled potential audience of billions conveniently gathered in groups self-selected by taste, talent, and temperament, and a growing number of galleries equipped with screens to "hang" digital images. For all that, though, plenty of others believe that finished means "printed." From those whose interest dates from the old days of wet (and smelly) darkrooms to those who are recent converts to analog methods, the attraction of physical experiments and real-world results is irresistible. This month's featured artist, Belarusian alt-process photographer, Anna Melnikova, is one of those.

Starting early, Melnikova was clearly destined to be an artist, taking a straight path from talented child to art school, art college, and the Belarusian Academy of Arts, leading to a career as an artist, art photographer, graphic designer, art historian, and professor. Like many others, in reaction to the limits of traditional photography, she turned to gum bichromate printing, cyanotype, photogram, pinhole, and, with this series, mordantage, where she found, in alt-processes, ways to merge her love for graphics, painting, and photography into one cohesive art form. Her images mix structured composition with random effects, form with flow, and geometry with serendipity in a way that clearly reveals the artist's unique presence. Unlike some alt-pix which could as easily, and more interestingly, have been done in conventional silver, Melnikova's adventurous artworks marry design and discovery to show her own creative intention, vision, and voice.

I close my eyes and see the light. Eclipse. Waves of light gather in a circle. I think about the circle. It seems to me that a circle is part of a plane that lies inside the circle. In other words, my alter ego tells me, this is the geometric locus of points on the plane, the distance from which to a given point, called the center of the circle, do not exceed a given non-negative number  $R$ . The number  $R$ , I add, is called the radius of this circle. Now I feel calm. I am growing confident that if the radius is zero, the circle degenerates into a point. I see a circle whose thickness is insignificant compared to its radius. I gave it the name – disk.



I know you shouldn't look at the sun. The light can kill me. The eclipse gives me hope to live a little longer, but my eyes do not deceive me. I can feel my retina is starting to peel off. The disk is imprinted on my eyes by a shining deity and turns into a square. I think a square is a polygon with four equal sides and equal angles. By the magnitude of these angles, I judge the curvature of the plane. The square sun turns into a sphere. I can't decide whether the angles of a spherical square are bigger than or less than the right angles. My eyes become wet. The square floats and flows out of me with tears. Victory over the sun!



I have come to the conclusion that astrology is a pseudoscience. Though everything I predicted for him came true, I cannot believe it to be true. Even geometry can be deceiving. There has been a decree stating that all exact sciences are lies and people must believe in it. When I close my eyes, I see nothing but myself. I'm thinking about the circle. I'm thinking about the disk. I remember the square. I feel extremely excited when I remember the inscribed and circumscribed circles. They no longer believe that the radius of the inscribed circle of a square is equal to half the side of the square. People don't need eclipses anymore. They don't remember that the circumradius of a square is equal to half the diagonal of the square. I feel like the last person on earth who knows that the area of the circumscribed circle is twice the area of the inscribed circle. Despite this, I remember everything.



I believe that everything will be fine. There's a chance it might happen tomorrow or maybe it won't happen at all. I wonder if there's anyone else who believes in the future like I do. Silence. All I hear is silence, except for a faint voice that I can't quite understand. It feels like we're far apart, my other self and me, the only ones talking in the never-ending corridors of the eclipse. My eyes are shut. I'm drifting slowly in the dark.

*Day Four*



I am both here and there at the same time. I can't be seen, but I'm everywhere. I'm inside and outside. I like to think about the nature of my geometric body. Maybe I'm a ball that rolls through the tunnel from eclipse to eclipse. It's so nice to be the sum of all points in space that are located at a distance from the center no more than a given one. I will diligently hide my radius and diameter from everyone. Mystery must grow within me. No one should know that my diameter is stationary, while my semicircle rotates around it constantly. My axis will be mystery number one. My poles will be securely hidden under ice caps. My surface is called a sphere. I am both closed and open. Yet this is not enough for me. I yearn to be a Hypersphere.



I remember that I was once Earth. People called me mother, cradle and home. We lived in peace and joy. My oceans were clear and calm. My forests provided shade and coolness on hot days. My air was fresh and pleasant to the taste. Then, the darkness returned. The light dried up, and I fell asleep. They didn't know what they were doing. The little buggers that grew up in my cradle imagined themselves to be gods. I'm tired of them. I woke up and decided to destroy them all, but it was too late. They tore off my clothes, poisoned my blood, raped my flesh, and left me for dead in the middle of a dirty corridor. Well, that is life. I died, and they died with me.



I am not a human being. I am an image of a person. I am not the number eight — I am the sign of infinity. I am alpha and omega. My facial features are still recognizable, but ...



... I am constantly transforming. My nature and essence have been studied and interpreted by lovers, philosophers, psychologists, theologians at various levels of generalization. However, there is no agreement among them about not only the nature of God, but even the existence of God at all.



I'm talking to you, which means you still exist. You can no longer make out the features of my face, which means you are going blind. Never look at your sun with hope again. Look at me only when I allow your bodies to block the light emanating from me. Look at the radiance that emanates from me with humility. Believe in me and I will give you love. Love is blind.



I defend the freedom of subject matter from meaning.  
You are a prejudice of the past. I am the basic element of existence.  
You need a theater. I speak a different language.  
You cry from powerlessness. I laugh with joy.  
You don't know the answers. I tell riddles.  
You create objects. I create non-objective art.  
You worship the rainbow. I sleep with my eyes open.  
You love life. I stand next to death and defeat it.  
You are looking for beauty. I give you a square.  
He painted the square black. I have made it better.



I read that the structure of the universe is expressed in simple geometric shapes: a straight line, a rectangle, a circle, a square, signifying the infinity of space. It seems to me that any path ends sooner or later, even if you go in circles. The eclipse corridor does not end. We told ourselves it looked like the number eight. I'm sure both of us were wrong now. This is the sign of infinity. It feels like I'm trapped, destined to wander in darkness from one eclipse to another, going round and round. Light and darkness tore the square into stripes. Lines, infinitely long and thin spatial objects, run across a small screen of an old TV. Time passes by quickly. You say to me, "Stop!" I open my eyes and see light.



## Artist Interview - Anna Melnikova

Welcome, Anna! Yours is unusual and beautiful work.  
Where did you start and how it you find this moment?

Probably my story is quite classic. I was born in the city of Mogilev in Belarus. I was able to draw well from early childhood and my parents noticed my abilities and everything began to take shape in the right direction – art school, art college, and then the Belarusian Academy of Arts in Minsk.



Anna Melnikova

Photo: Victor Senkov

From the beginning, I dreamed of being a painter. In art college, I worked hard on it but I met a teacher who changed my point of view. He said I should change my focus to graphic design at the Academy of Arts, where I would receive the knowledge needed for me to become a real artist. And so it happened that, when I graduated from the Academy, I was invited to teach in the graphic arts department

there. I am immensely grateful to my teachers and colleagues, who have shaped my vision, and the atmosphere in which I worked, which has influenced me and my formation as an artist.

**From comprehensive academic training in graphic design, how did you end up in the alt-processes world?**

Another turning point in my life. During my time as a student at the Academy of Arts, I discovered my passion for photography. However, I felt like something was missing. It wasn't until five years after graduating that I became intrigued by alternative processes. My first foray into this area was through the gum bichromate printing process which combined painting and photography in a way that captivated me. I taught myself everything there was to know about this technique and experimented with it extensively. This led me to explore other alternative techniques that piqued my interest. Using these techniques in my photography allowed me to merge my love for graphics, painting, and photography into one cohesive art form.

**Some alt-artists' images are mainly about technique. Your work uses the craft to deliver the concept.**

To me, a successful project is one that combines a great idea with impeccable execution. Prior to starting an art project, I spend a significant amount of time perfecting my techniques. I often spend the entire day in the laboratory to master specific techniques, as I am a natural perfectionist and believe that everything must be executed flawlessly. This can be both beneficial and detrimental, as I can become consumed with completing tasks to my exact standards. However, I realize that the most crucial aspect

of creating an art project is not perfecting the technique, but rather developing a captivating concept.

### **Mordançage is a great fit for this project.**

Two years ago, this photographic series began with a new passion for learning the mordançage technique. As an alternative processes photographer, I always strive to experiment and push my creativity. It took a significant amount of time to master the technique, but eventually, I began exploring how to use it in a unique way. My goal was to create something surreal and abstract. I decided to use the technique on a photogram I had made using simple geometric shapes. This image led to the creation of the first image in the series, corresponding to "Day One" in this issue, which served as the inspiration for the rest of the portfolio. This photographic series is my profound reflection on our world, particularly during this period, which I see as a long "corridor of eclipses." Despite the thousands of possibilities for development, our world falls into senseless wars and battles for power. However, I remain optimistic that we will emerge from the darkness into a renaissance of our world, filled with light and hope.

### **Do you see a specifically "political" role for your work?**

As an artist in the modern world, I believe it is important to use my work to address social issues and shed light on the struggles faced by people around the globe. The events happening in the world have a significant impact on our lives, and my art reflects the current issues that concern me as an individual living in this era. I communicate my message through metaphors and symbolism, which may not be immediately understood by all viewers. However, when someone is able to comprehend the meaning behind my work, it is a great

accomplishment and brings joy to me as an artist. “Corridor of Eclipses,” utilizes metaphors to express the state of the world and the challenges we are currently facing. Many viewers have found the project to be emotionally moving, as it conveys a sense of tragedy, but also provides a message of hope. Through art, we are able to think deeply, feel more profoundly, and experience the



Gallery Art Fabrica, Minsk, Belarus

Photo: Victor Senkov

full range of human emotions. Ultimately, art can give us hope and provide a sense of renewal during difficult times.

### **Experimentation invites failures. How do you improve your chances for success?**

Having a strong understanding of the fundamentals of composition, color theory, and drawing is essential for creating artistic photography. Being knowledgeable in other art forms allows me to think like an artist, rather than just a technician. But, I strongly believe that success

favors the brave. Although there may be setbacks along the way, with dedication and perseverance, one can achieve their goals. In fact, failure can often lead to new and innovative ideas that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. Personally, I am a determined individual who is not easily discouraged. I will work as much as necessary, and if something doesn't work out for me, I will never leave it, because I will fight to the last until I can do what I want. I believe that hard work and creativity can help us turn failures into something special, bringing unique and original outcomes. This is why I enjoy experimenting and am always open to new ideas and possibilities.

**Where do good ideas come from? What encourages your creativity? Long days? Late nights? Coffee? Prosecco?**

That's an interesting question! While it may be a joke, I do enjoy good wine, prosecco, rum, and coffee. As for the process of creating ideas, I find that they often come to me spontaneously and unexpectedly. They seem to arise when I'm working, in the darkroom, while traveling, or even during long walks and conversations. I believe that ideas emerge from the accumulation of information in the mind, sort of like a collection of energy that sparks when you read, see, and experience new things. Films, books, music, exhibitions, travel, and conversations all contribute to this accumulation of information. However, it's important to remember that inspiration often comes while working, so don't wait for it to strike. As I often tell my students, inspiration is like appetite – it comes naturally while eating.

**You have been a teacher since the beginning. Worth it?**

Teaching can be a challenging profession that often leaves me feeling exhausted. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of

witnessing my students succeed and express gratitude makes it all worth it. After graduating from the Academy of Arts, I have continued to teach for the past 12 years and work with students on a regular basis. My schedule is quite busy, and I work tirelessly to balance my profession and creativity. I find great joy in teaching, particularly when working with gifted individuals. I teach calligraphy, typography, and design projects; it helps to always be in good brain shape. Despite the challenges of combining teaching with my own art practice, I find that they both complement each other and help me stay sharp, innovative, and continually developing. Balancing the demands of my role as a professor with my artistic pursuits can be challenging, but creating is essential to me. It is how I live and breathe.

**Experimental art also invites controversy. Have there been reviews, positive or negative, that you've found meaningful?**

It is always valuable to know people's opinions, especially when you are doing something unfamiliar. However, it is important to be prepared for the fact that not everyone will understand you. Recently, I showcased my project at two venues in Minsk during a personal exhibition. I received positive feedback from art critics, professionals, and fellow artists, which was very encouraging.

Interestingly, photographers were more interested in the technique since I am the only person in my country working with the mordantage technique. On the other hand, artists were more interested in discussing the idea and visual aspects of the project. It was great to hear how they understood my metaphors. Most importantly, I was pleased that the general public, who were not necessarily professionals, showed interest in my project. While it may

be for everyone, I am glad that it found its audience, and that those who appreciated it were delighted.



Master Class - Gallery Art Fabrika - Minsk, Belarus

Photo: Victor Senkov

### **Artists, particularly those who teach, are often insightful critics and curators. What guides your critical judgments?**

I have extensive experience curating exhibitions featuring graphics, photography, and design, as well as organizing large festivals at various venues. Working with people has proven to be both challenging and interesting. My first step is always to establish a clear concept for the exhibition or festival, ensuring I fully comprehend what I hope to achieve. Then, I proceed to select artists who align with my vision and concept. Inviting authors that match my concept is typically easier than selecting from those who apply, as it can be difficult to find the right match. I aim to discover works that demonstrate a high level of professional skill, originality of ideas, an interesting

formal and compositional approach, and an energetic presence – pieces that merge thought and form, and possess an emotional charge. It is also essential to consider the public and different types of viewers. Thus, I choose not only works that I personally enjoy but also pieces that have the potential to surprise viewers. When evaluating works, I avoid using the principle of "I like" or "I don't like" as my personal taste and preferences may clash with the tastes of other artists and curators. Instead, I focus on the work's merit and whether it aligns with the exhibition's concept and goals. It is essential to avoid focusing solely on personal tastes and preferences when selecting works.

### **How do you seek out opportunities for exhibitions and shows? Professional representation? An agent?**

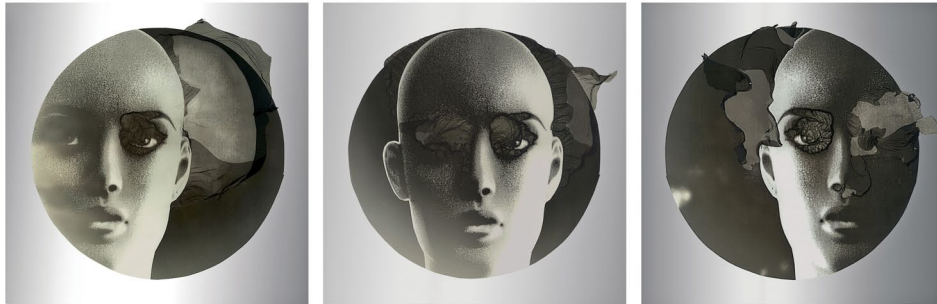
Finding galleries in my country is not a challenge since there are not many of them. If you are a member of the artists' union, you can easily get into them. However, I am on the lookout for galleries that can showcase my work globally. It is quite challenging to find galleries that specialize in alternative and art photography.

### **Talk about the Belarusian Union of Artists. There is no such thing in the United States.**

The Belarusian Union of Artists is one of the oldest public creative organizations in the republic, uniting professional artists and art critics from all regions of Belarus. It is organized like a small state, with a Congress, Rada, Presidium, and Secretariat, with elected officials for 14 sections, each representing one of the arts, all under a General Secretary and two deputies. The Union owns exhibition spaces and galleries, art studios, as well as art factories, including factories for sculpture, along with the

Palace of Arts, one of the largest exhibition complexes in Minsk.

Becoming a union member is not easy. A professional art education, as well as prior participation in 10 national exhibitions organized by the Union. New members are accepted once a year and must provide a portfolio of their work. We pay fees once a year, they are small – about \$25. The Union has no sponsorship and is self-sufficient. Being part of the Union has great importance to me. Currently, I am the head of the section consisting of artists who work in the field of graphic design and photography. We collaborate on various projects and exhibitions, which is always an enriching experience.



**Very few of us have tried mordantage. How does it work and what do potential experimenters need to know?**

For this series, I made photograms in an ordinary darkroom using normal analog processing. After the initial images are developed, fixed, and dried, the process requires protective suits and good ventilation due to the dangerous and harmful chemicals involved. Processing continues using a chemical solution to alter the silver gelatin print to bleach and lift the black emulsion away from

the paper substrate. Once the safety precautions are in place, the resulting veil of free emulsion can be manipulated, shaped, and adjusted in room light to achieve the desired result.

The process is unpredictable and uncontrollable and requires intuition and improvisation from the artist. For me, despite the uncertainty, the joy of creating even one successful image makes the work worthwhile.

**Is there any attraction in AI applications for you as an artist, or as a teacher?**

I don't use artificial intelligence. I am only interested in the creations of human intelligence and human effort. We try to prevent students from using artificial intelligence, but this is increasingly becoming a problem in education.

**What's in your future? Travel, a book, an upcoming exhibition or new experiment?**

As someone who loves to explore new and innovative ideas, I find that travel is a great source of inspiration for me. Specifically, I'm particularly drawn to Italy and much of my work is inspired by my experiences there. For the past five years, I've been working on a special project dedicated to the city of Rome called "100 Details of the Eternal." This project is incredibly important to me as it's a tribute to the city that I fell in love with at first sight. The goal of the project is to showcase the city through small, often overlooked details that when put together, create a magnificent and grand image of Rome that's not often seen by residents or tourists alike. To create the works, I used

the ancient technique of gum bichromate printing and I'm proud to say that all 100 pieces are complete. My next goal is to create a book and host a large exhibition in Rome to share this project with others. Unfortunately, the person who was originally interested in this project, and who was looking for funding for the exhibit, has passed away, making it difficult to proceed. Although this project is emotionally difficult for me, I'm confident that I'll be able to bring it to fruition.

**Thank you very much, Anna. How can we see more and stay in touch?**

My work is showcased in various galleries in my country: [Gallery Artcenter](#), [Gallery Mastatstva](#), and [Gallery Art Fabrica](#).

My prints are in the American online gallery [GALLERY 5X7 – Gallery of Handcrafted Alternative Process Photography](#), and in Italy in the [Passepartoutprize](#) gallery.

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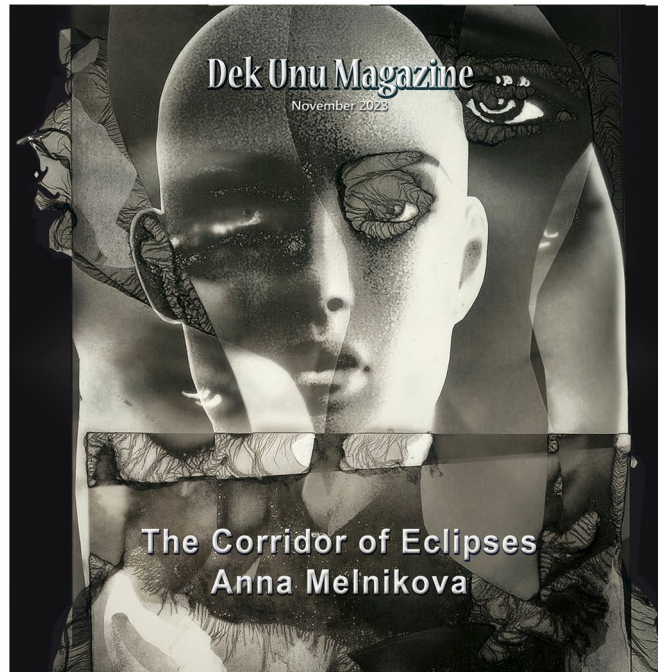
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# Dek Unu in Print

The printed edition of *The Corridor of Eclipses* is available for sale through Magcloud. Each printed issue is 40 full-color pages, 20 cm square, printed on #80 acid-free paper, perfect bound in heavier, UV-coated cover stock – more like a poetry chapbook than like a typical saddle-stitched magazine. A digital, e-reader version of the magazine is included at no additional cost with each paperback sale.



*Dek Unu Magazine* is not-for-profit, does not accept outside advertising of any kind, and never charges artists a fee to submit their work. Sales of the printed edition are a primary source of income and the profit from during each publication month is split 50-50 with the featured artist.

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# Dek Unu Arts

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